

Blueprint for School Readiness

A comprehensive plan for children
from *Zero to Five* to ensure healthy
development and readiness for success
in school and life

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Vision: *"Every Alabama Child will have the opportunity to succeed in life"*



Mission: To work in partnership with other public and private entities to maintain an effective state and local system of resources and support that enables parents, families, and others who care for young children to ensure that they are healthy, protected, nurtured, and offered every opportunity to succeed in life.

Public Awareness/Engagement

- ★ Our goal is to build public understanding and “will” for increased attention to and investment in the most critical years of development.
- ★ A statewide group of stakeholders is working on a coordinated campaign, *Zero to Five Matters*, providing a consistent message and many state and local “messenger”.
- ★ Promote the United Way Success by Six campaign “Born Learning”.

Comprehensive "Systems"

Develop a state and local structure for early care and education.

Fully utilize existing programs/agencies -- direct resources toward specific outcomes.

Public/private partnership concept.



A Building Process

- Alabama Dept. of Public Health, Comprehensive Systems Planning
- And, compilation of (12) different planning initiatives for early care and education
- Adopted by the Alabama Partnership for Children and the Superintendent's Association of the Governor's Black Belt Action Commission

12 Different Plans

1987-88 Governor's Child Day Care Task Force

1994 Child Care Commission Recommendations

2000 Early Learning Commission Report

2000 Early Childhood Agenda for the South, SECA

2001 Smart Start Technical Assistance Plan for Alabama

2000-02 University of Alabama Action Agenda for Alabama's Children

2002 Social and Emotional Foundations of Early Learning Strategic Plan

2003 Child Day Care Advisory Committee Recommendations

2004 Children's Policy Council Needs Assessments

2004 HHS-sponsored planning for early childhood system

2004 ADPH Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems planning

2004 ACF Strengthening Families Leadership Forum

Best Practices/Research

- National Governor's Association "Building the Foundation for Bright Futures"
- Alabama Partnership for Children's System Mapping, 2001 ELC Report
- "Good Start, Grow Smart"
- National School Readiness Indicators Initiative
- *School Readiness: Closing Racial and Ethnic Gaps, The Future of Children* (Brookings Institute)

Another Plan?

The *Blueprint* is the structure through which we can better utilize our resources, offer an effective plan for leveraging additional resources, and measure our progress toward our goals.

It is comprehensive and ambitious, so there is room for everyone. . .

Blueprint -- Comprehensive Plan

- for healthy development and school readiness for *Zero to Five*
- widely known, endorsed, promoted
- structure for planning, needs assessment, funding, advocacy, accountability, and policy decisions

The support and leadership of all facets of the community are needed.

Changing the Future, One Child At A Time

Economic Development:

"Early childhood development programs are rarely portrayed as economic development initiatives, and we think that is a mistake. . . Policymakers must identify the educational investments that yield the highest public returns. Here the literature is clear: Dollars invested in ECD yield extraordinary public returns. The return on investment from early childhood development is extraordinary, resulting in better working public schools, more educated workers and less crime. . . investment in human capital breeds economic success not only for those being educated, but also for the overall economy."--

Art Rolnick and Rob Grunewald, Federal Reserve
Bank of Minneapolis.

School Readiness

- Early experiences have a strong, lasting influence on later learning and are essential for healthy brain development.
-- "Rethinking the Brain: New Insights Into Early Development", Shore, 1997.
- Schools can expect to save more than \$11,000 per child for children who benefit from high quality early learning experiences because these children are less likely to require special or remedial education. -- National Institute for Early Education Research, 2002.

History Repeats Itself; Opportunity Does Not

While 85% of a child's brain development occurs by age three, less than 1% of public investments on education and development have occurred by that time in Alabama.

-- "Early Learning Left Out," VOICES for America's Children and the Child and Family Policy Center, 2004.

The Nation's Number 1 Education Goal

"The business community supports high-quality early childhood education programs because they lead to improved education results, a world-class work force, a healthier society, and ultimately a stronger economy."

-- Joseph M. Tucci, the Business Round Table,
President and CEO of EMC Corporation

"Government agencies and philanthropic organizations should focus on activities that have the greatest long-term social and economic results. Top-quality preschool education fits the bill. *This should become a national priority*". Newsday, December 2002.

Business Week included early care and education for all children as one of its "25 Ideas For A Changing World".



"Children who enter school not ready to learn continue to have difficulty later in life . . . they are more likely to become teen parents, engage in criminal activities. . . attain less education and are more likely to be unemployed." The most promising strategy at present is increasing access to high-quality early childhood programs for poor children – a step that will measurably increase achievement and narrow the school readiness gap of poor and minority children."

School Readiness: Closing Racial and Ethnic Gaps, The Future of Children

We also know that. . .

- There is a clear connection between language development, vocabulary, and early reading.
- Growth in language and cognition should occur in the context of the other areas of development: social and emotional and physical.

- For children who are not reading on grade level in first grade, there is a 90% chance that they will not be on grade level by grade 4.
- It is estimated that about half of the gap in children's school achievement is present when they enter school.

And, we know that . . .

Each year, about 60,000 babies are born in Alabama, and they will pass quickly through the most critical years of development and opportunity for impact – during a single gubernatorial term.

They will then all arrive at school “ready or not”, and our schools will be accountable for their progress.

Our proposal is to invest more when it means more, so that all children have the best start in life. The plan is comprehensive, evidence-based, and built on the premise that all families can raise healthy, strong children who are ready for the rigors and opportunities of the K-12 education system.

Blueprint for School Readiness

Ready Families

+ Ready Communities

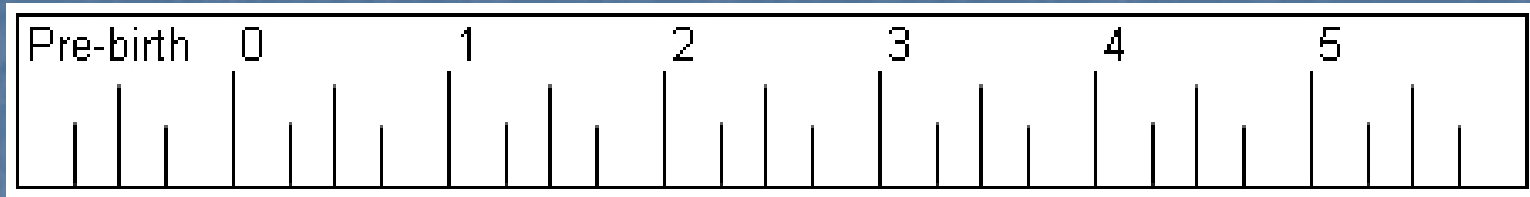
+ Ready Services (Health, ECE)

+ Ready Schools

= Ready Children With Bright Futures



Alabama Partnership for Children's School Readiness Ruler*



Every Child Should Have:

Ready Families –

+

Ready Communities –

+

Ready Services (Health /Education) –

+

Ready Schools –

Information, resources and support for stable families, involved parents, protection and nurturing, basic needs

Access to high quality early learning programs, concrete support, health insurance and preventive care, reduced child poverty, regular assessment and referral, coordinated high quality early learning system with emphasis on early literacy and social/emotional needs

School leadership, language and reading readiness, school transition teams

= Ready Children Prepared For School Success and Bright Futures

*Adapted from the AL State Board of Education's *Educational Ruler: Making and Measuring Progress*
For more information on *Zero to Five Matters*, contact the Alabama Partnership for Children at 1-866-711-4025

Building Consensus on Priorities in Local Communities

A local demonstration:

- nearly 50 community stakeholders
- (5) group planning sessions to identify most critical needs (resources)
- “vote” on priorities/recommendations
- sign on as lead/support agencies and programs
- compile all into community-wide plan

1) READY FAMILIES – Parents and families play the most critical role in children's healthy development. Providing the resources, information, and supportive network to parents enables them to do their best job of raising healthy, ready children.

Rationale: Mother's educational level and being born to a single mother are two of the most powerful predictors of poor outcomes. The early relationships developed in a caring environment of nurturing and protection are critical to young children's future success. Providing information and support beginning at the time of birth are effective in supporting effective parenting.

- A. Mother's Education Level -- % of births to mothers with less than 12th grade
- B. Births to Teens and Single Mothers -- # of births to teens, and % of births to unmarried women
- C. Vulnerable Families (multiple risk factors); Two parents -- % of children with (2) parents actively involved; family divorce rates
- D. Child Abuse and Neglect – rate of substantiated child abuse and neglect
- E. Substance Abuse Rates – arrest rates for drugs and alcohol
- F. Family Information and Resources -- % of parents of newborns receiving resources at the time of birth; % of families participating in a parent support program (research-based)
- G. Increased awareness – community-wide awareness and education effort

2) READY COMMUNITIES – Parents need a wide range of supports and connections to provide stable homes where children can thrive. Community emphasis should be on empowering families as first teachers and as primary caregivers and supporters of children.

- A. Young Children in Poverty -- % of children under 6 in families below FPL
- B. Supports for Families of Young Children – community connections for social networks, parenting support activities, family strengthening emphasis in programs
- C. Coordinated Emergency Assistance – access to emergency assistance for basic home needs, clearinghouse of assistance and programs available, common/shared intake, plan for family strengthening
- D. Common Intake/Referral for Early Education Options – # of agencies and programs using a community-wide intake form; process to make referrals and track data

3) READY SERVICES – HEALTH – Access to health insurance and a medical home are necessary for children's optimum development. This includes prenatal care, well-baby check-ups and immunizations, and detection and treatment of illness and delays.

- A. Health Insurance -- % of children under age 6 without health insurance
- B. Low Birthweight Infants -- % of infants born weighing under 5.5 pounds
- C. Prenatal Care -- % of births to women who receive late or no prenatal care
- D. Immunizations -- % of children who have been fully immunized at kindergarten
- E. Medical Homes -- % of children who receive their health care from a consistent health care provider
- F. Comprehensive Screenings -- % of children who receive periodic developmental screenings and appropriate referrals

4) READY SERVICES – EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION – Working families need access to dependable, high quality child care, and children benefit from developmentally appropriate programs with a commitment to high quality experiences. (Over 60% of Alabama's young children have their parents in the workforce). In a variety of settings, children can benefit from programs that are staffed by well-educated, caring teachers who provide a language-rich experience based on children's developmental levels.

Supporting high quality early learning settings that actively engage and support parents and help build resiliency is also cited as an effective strategy for preventing child abuse and neglect.

- A. Children Enrolled in EE Program -- # of slots available in quality programs; % of preschoolers (infants through Pre-K) enrolled in high quality programs
- B. Early Education Teachers -- % of ECE teachers with a CDA credential, 2- or 4-year degree in child development and specialized training in ECE; turnover rate of ECE teachers
- C. High Quality Child Care Programs -- % of child care programs nationally accredited or demonstrating high quality through an objective measure (Star rating); % of programs participating in quality enhancement system; % of children attending a Star-rated program
- D. Access to Child Care Subsidies -- % of eligible children under 6 receiving child care subsidy or other financial assistance/scholarships

5) READY SCHOOLS – Because schools are accountable for the progress of children once they enter Kindergarten, schools need to support efforts to enhance children's readiness. The transition into Kindergarten and the first few grades often lay the foundation for success or failure in school. Schools can provide leadership and guidance for a better transition to improve the likelihood of early success, and schools are uniquely situated to share key data about kindergarten readiness.

- A. Class Size – average teacher/child ratio in K-1 classrooms
- B. Language Readiness -- % of children proficient on DIBELS
- C. School Success – 1st grade retention rates; % of children with reading and language proficiency by Grade 3; special education enrollment rates
- D. Transition Teams -- % of schools participating in community transition teams made up of child care, Head Start, kindergarten teachers

6) READY CHILDREN – The Five Domains of School Readiness developed through a wealth of research on which there is consensus are: physical well-being and motor development; social and emotional development; approaches to learning; language development; and cognition and general knowledge.

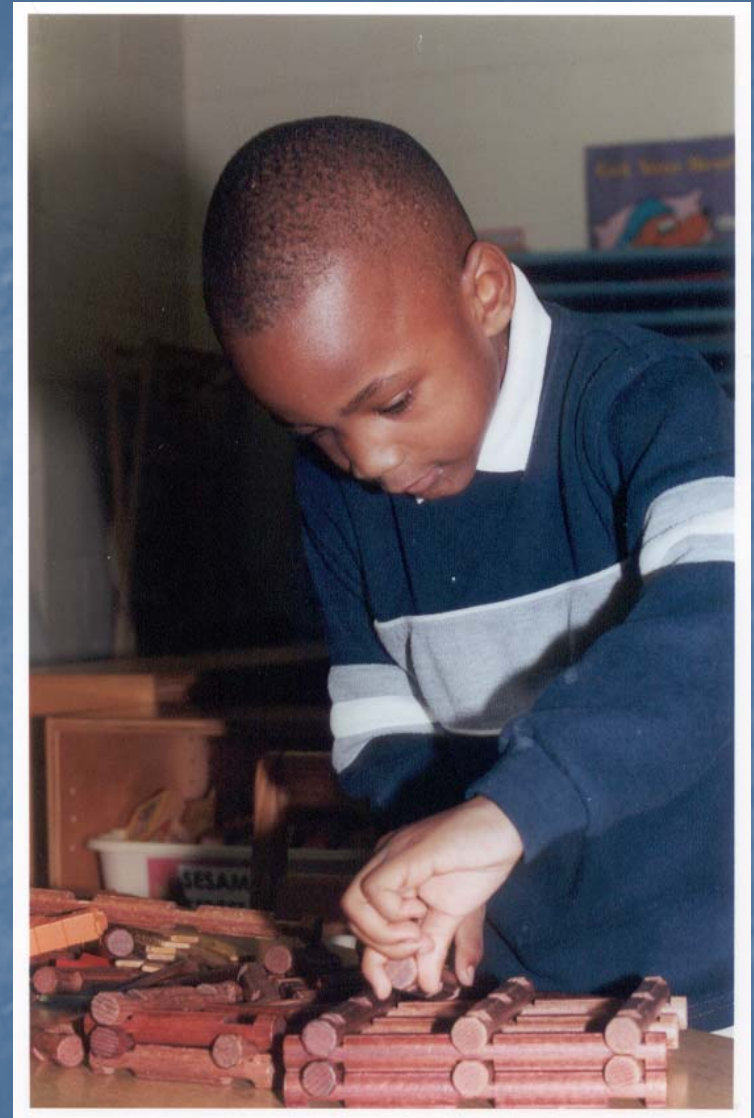
- A. Physical Well-Being and Motor Development -- % of children with age-appropriate fine motor skills
- B. Social and Emotional Development -- % of children who often or very often exhibit positive social behaviors when interacting with peers
- C. Approaches to Learning -- % of kindergarten children with moderate to serious difficulty following directions
- D. Language Development -- % of children almost always recognizing the relationships between letters and sounds at kindergarten entry; % of children proficient on the DIBELS
- E. Cognition and General Knowledge -- % of children recognizing basic shapes

Where To Go From Here?

- Need ongoing oversight of progress and accountability
- Partnership, a Commission, a Committee (ECE of CPC)
- Need steady, effective leadership to sustain momentum
- Partners demonstrate commitment to it (signing a charter, pledge, or partnership agreement, etc).
- The vision is a great step, but “staying the course” is difficult – need plan for regular feedback and input into the dynamic process of systems building

*The only
substance
known to man
from which a
productive adult
can be made
is the human
child.*

– Author Unknown





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“Every Alabama Child Will Have The Opportunity To Succeed In Life”